

# PrEP and PEP Access Is Challenging: Changing the Paradigm with Online Navigation Services

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## Background

The CDC estimates 1.1 million U.S. adults could benefit from PrEP<sup>1</sup> but there are only up to 273,000 current PrEP users.<sup>2</sup>

Nationally, an estimated 1.4% of Black Americans and 2.5% of Latinx Americans who could benefit from PrEP have filled a PrEP prescription, compared with 14% of White potential PrEP users.<sup>1</sup> Stigma at the social and provider levels combines with other structural barriers to make PrEP access even more difficult for non-White individuals who may benefit.<sup>3 4 5</sup>

HIV-prevention education and benefits navigation is also essential to help potential users access insurance coverage, government PrEP programs, and industry-sponsored services.

**Navigation is the provision of support to guide consumers through the complicated insurance and health care systems to help facilitate access to PrEP services**

People seek sexual health information online.<sup>6</sup> Online chat provides confidential and anonymous support to people seeking to access PrEP. Online chat can also support health care workers with questions about sexual health and benefits navigation for their clients.

## PleasePrEPMe:Connect

**PleasePrEPMe:Connect is a bilingual English and Spanish online chat service that seeks to reach potential PrEP/PEP candidates in California who may not yet be engaged in care.**

Hours of operation are Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. PST.

Chats can be anonymous and no major identifying information is required to chat, ever.

PleasePrEPMe utilizes a sexual health coaching model (Fig. 1) to support visitors in achieving their sexual health goals. A comprehensive HIV-prevention approach is used, including PEP, TasP/U=U, and HIV 101, to holistically serve the needs of visitors at all stages in the PrEP care continuum.

Online marketing and outreach has focused on Black and Latinx men who have sex with men and transgender women in areas with lower PrEP uptake and fewer PrEP resources.

Outreach to clinics helps PleasePrEPMe link professionals to training, capacity-building, and educational resources, and provide support to health care workers as well.

PleasePrEPMe also works with the California Department of Public Health to educate consumers and clinic workers about the PrEP Assistance Program (CA PrEP-AP), another resource to help pay for PrEP.

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Figure 1: PleasePrEPMe sexual health coaching model

## Conclusions

**Online support for health systems navigation can act as an essential conduit of confidential, accurate information that is otherwise inaccessible due to geography, stigma, misinformation, or lack of resources.**

**An online sexual health coaching model is successful at reaching a range of information-seekers—from those not already engaged in HIV-prevention care, to staff navigating PrEP and PEP clients through payment and insurance systems.**

**By educating potential PrEP users comprehensively about HIV-prevention options and linking them with services, PleasePrEPMe helps providers transition consumers along the continuum of PrEP care. This can contribute to an informed “head start” before PrEP seekers even set foot in the clinic.**

## 2018 Results

Of the 775 chat interactions analyzed:

Visitors ranged widely in age, from 13–70+.

95% were in English, 5% were in Spanish.

60% of visitors were potential PrEP/PEP users;

33% were clinic and community-based organization staff based throughout California seeking support with complicated cases or requesting resources.

7% were clinicians.

Chat topics included\*:

- Health systems and benefits navigation (45%)
- PrEP basics (35%)
- PEP, TasP/U=U, and HIV 101 (14%)
- Other items related to PleasePrEPMe (updating the directory, locating resources, etc.) (18%)

\*More than one topic is often covered in a single session.

8% of chats required follow-up:

- Emergency PEP needs, incl. sexual assault (34%)
- Providing hyper-local lists of providers (14%)
- Complex insurance, incl. Medicaid/Medi-Cal (11%)
- Locating trans- and HRT-competent PrEP providers (8%)

Surveys are emailed immediately post-chat to visitors who provide an email address (10% response rate, 30/302).

97% of survey respondents were likely/very likely to recommend PleasePrEPMe's services

28% of visitors (218/775) received a referral to a specific provider and provided their email address. These visitors received a 14-day follow-up survey (8% response rate, 17/218). Of those, 38% had received a PrEP prescription.

Reasons given for NOT receiving a prescription include:

- Issues with insurance coverage
- Unsupportive providers or unresponsive frontline staff
- Other issues related to complexity of access

Average chat duration: 12 min, 1 sec  
Longest chat: 94 min

### References

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